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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JACKY ROSEN, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Gracious God, today accept the love and loyalty of our hearts. We are grateful for Your loving kindness and tender mercies.

Lord, we desire to please You by living for Your glory. Continue to bless our lawmakers. May they seek guidance from Your holy Word, permitting sacred precepts to provide lamps for their feet and light for their path. May this light also illuminate the road ahead for others who walk in darkness, so that Your will for our Nation and world may be done.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 23, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JACKY ROSEN, a Sen-

ator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. ROSEN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate was given an opportunity to begin debate on a subject that by all rights should be beyond debate: protecting the right to vote.

As we all know, Republican legislatures across the country are passing some of the most draconian restrictions on the right to vote in decades—a throwback to Jim Crow.

Every single Democrat yesterday voted to begin debate on legislation to fight back against this assault—and that is what it is, an assault on our democracy—every single one. It was the first time in this Congress that we have united all 50 Democrats on moving forward with strong and comprehensive voting rights legislation.

Senate Republicans, to the very last Member, voted against allowing the Senate to even have a debate on voting rights. Not a single Republican voted to move forward with a simple debate. In fact, the Republican leader went so far as to say that “regardless of what may be happening in some states”—voter suppression laws, phony audits, or the partisan takeover of election boards—he believes the Federal Gov-

ernment should not intervene. Who said that? Southern Senators from the Civil War all the way through said States’ rights—used as a tool to prevent particularly people of color from voting. And to invoke that in 2020? The majority leader is way off—way off base. It is disgraceful that he would even invoke that.

Yesterday’s vote was another piece of evidence that voter suppression is now part of the official platform of the Republican Party. But I want to be clear about one thing. As I said last night, the fight to protect voting rights is far, very far from over. Yesterday’s vote was the starting gun, not the finish line.

As the Senate majority leader, I reserve the right to bring up this issue for debate again. Yesterday was the first time we tried to consider major voting rights legislation, but it won’t be the last. Democrats will explore every option available to us for reconsidering legislation on this topic. We will leave no stone unturned. Voting rights are too important. The fight against modern-day voter suppression is just beginning.

One other point. Some of them like to make this point: Oh, this is just a partisan fight. Bull. This is a fight for the soul of America, and it shouldn’t be partisan, and it never was in the past. When legislatures try to prevent poor people, people of color, urban people, and young people from voting, that is not a political fight; that is what America is all about. So don’t try to hide under that guise.

It is Republican legislatures doing this. But in the past, when legislatures, usually in the South, tried to do these things—and in other places—both parties united to stop it. No more, sadly. Shame, shame, shame, shame on my Republican colleagues. This is a very bad day for them that history will recognize.

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on another matter, this week, the Senate will continue restoring balance to the Federal courts by considering more of President Biden's judicial appointments.

Over the next 2 days, we will consider Deborah Boardman to serve as district judge in Maryland and Candace Jackson-Akiwumi to serve as judge on the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Together, Ms. Boardman and Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi have had over 20 years of experience as Federal defenders.

I believe that bringing professional diversity as well as personal diversity to the bench should be and is now a top priority. There are plenty of former prosecutors and corporate lawyers wearing black robes. It is time that some voting rights attorneys, civil rights attorneys, and former Federal defenders, like these two nominees, bring their perspectives to the bench.

A final vote on Ms. Boardman's nomination will come this afternoon, and then we will proceed to the nomination of Ms. Jackson-Akiwumi, which we will finish before the end of the week. Again, the Senate will not leave for the week until we finish considering these judges. The Democratic majority in the Senate will continue to swiftly fill judicial vacancies.

On a related note, today, Chairman PETERS will ask the Senate to approve two critical cyber security nominees: Jen Easterly to be the Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and Robin Carnahan to be the Administrator of the GSA. Both of these Agencies play a critical role in our Nation's cyber security.

The threat of ransomware attacks and other cyber crimes is on the rise from State actors as well as cyber bandits who were given sanctuary by our adversaries. We need people at the helm on these important Agencies to focus on hardening our Nation's cyber security. This should be a completely nonpartisan issue, and my Republican friends should not object.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, in addition to our important work on judicial appointments, the Senate is moving forward on multiple legislative proposals to make historic investments in our Nation's infrastructure.

We have a chance in this Congress to get something big and bold done on infrastructure—something we haven't managed in a very long time. If we want America to prosper in the 21st century, we can't do it with infrastructure that is stuck in the last century. This is our chance to update, modernize, repair, and rebuild for another century of American economic growth, creating thousands upon thousands of good-paying jobs in the process.

Later today, Speaker PELOSI and I will meet with representatives from

the White House to discuss the next steps on this very topic. Here in the Senate, Democratic members of the Budget Committee continue to build on the fruitful conversations we had last week. In fact, earlier today, I spoke with all of our committee chairs about a forthcoming budget resolution.

As I have said, discussions about infrastructure are progressing along two tracks. The first is bipartisan, and the second incorporates elements of the President's American jobs and families plan. The second track is something we must support even if it doesn't get any Republican support. For several weeks, the trains have been chugging down both tracks quite well. When the Senate returns after the July 4 work period, it will be time to take the next step forward.

This summer, the Senate will begin considering the fiscal 2022 budget resolution and a bipartisan infrastructure bill on the floor. It is my hope to have both a bipartisan infrastructure bill and a budget resolution for the Senate to consider this summer. I believe the progress we have made in recent weeks will ultimately produce the result that will set our economy on a path to prosperity for generations to come.

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, one final matter: student loans. Today, I have joined Senator WARREN and a number of my House and Senate colleagues to urge the Biden administration to extend the pause on payments and interest for the vast majority of Federal student loans.

For millions of student borrowers, one of the most difficult challenges is balancing their debt with their dreams of starting a career, starting a family, and buying a home. When the pandemic hit, these challenges were magnified a hundredfold. Job opportunities disappeared, and our economy came to a halt. The pause on student loan repayment during the pandemic was a life-altering policy that allowed tens of millions of young people to escape financial ruin.

Right now, the current pause on repayment of student debt is set to expire on September 30. I believe that is too soon. Our economy is still recovering. Americans are still pulling themselves up and dusting themselves off after one of the greatest economic crises in our history. The October 1 expiration date could risk putting millions of student loan borrowers back into financial hardship.

Very simply, I am urging the Biden administration to extend the pause on student loan repayment by another 6 months, until March 2022. Even as the economy recovers, young people, borrowers with a load of debt, will struggle more than most to get back on their feet. Why not give them a little more breathing room?

I urge the Biden administration to extend the pause, and I will continue

working with Senator WARREN on ways to provide even more comprehensive, life-changing student loan forgiveness—a policy, I believe, that will expand opportunity for millions, millions of young Americans.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

RUSSIA

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, for the first time earlier this month, President Biden traveled to Europe. The primary purpose for this trip was to engage with some of America's closest friends and allies, but the agenda also included a one-on-one meeting with a staunch adversary, Vladimir Putin.

The President took office armed with a great deal of tough talk on Russia. He called his counterpart a "killer" and a "KGB thug" and warned he would "pay [the] price" for interference in U.S. elections. The world wondered whether this rhetoric would be underpinned by tough action. I certainly hoped it would.

Back in January, I made it clear that if the Biden administration was serious about "imposing real costs on Moscow," it would "find willing partners on Capitol Hill." But so far, there have been few encouraging signs for those of us who take Russia's threats very seriously.

Remember, after less than a week in office, President Biden agreed to Russian requests for a full 5-year extension of the New START Treaty, no strings attached. He gave it up for free, undermining our leverage to extract concessions in future negotiations.

Then, his administration rolled out a budget proposal that would cut investment in defense, in real terms—short-changing the modernization we need to keep pace with both Russia and China.

And 2 weeks ago, the President left for Europe, having already given the Kremlin two other gifts: a high-profile summit that experts predicted Putin would use to help legitimize his regime at home and abroad and a waiver of sanctions on the Russian-owned company behind a lucrative gas pipeline project.

So I will repeat for President Biden the same warning I offered to the previous administration: The Kremlin is